

YOU ARE DEAD by Peter James
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To my great shame, this is only the second novel by Peter James I have read, the first being *'Dead Simple'*. I was introduced to his books a couple of years ago by a friend, who was somewhat surprised I had never heard of his favourite author. Having now read two in the Roy Grace series, I can understand my friend's amazement.

THE PLOT

Ten years have past since Roy Grace's wife, Sandy, suddenly disappeared. After thinking he would never achieve happiness again, Roy has finally made a new life for himself with his second wife Cleo, and their baby son Noah. The family are now preparing to make a fresh start by moving to the country.

With only three and a half more days of his shift left before he is due to hand over to the next Senior Investigating Officer, Roy has arrived home hoping to help Cleo with the packing. However, crime does not work to a timetable and he is soon called back to the station to investigate the disappearance of a young woman, Logan Somerville.

Logan had telephoned her boyfriend, Jamie Ball, while he was driving home on the M23, saying there was a strange man lurking in the shadows of the underground car park near their apartment. After hearing her scream, just before her phone goes dead, he immediately calls the police. What begins as a simple case of possible abduction soon escalates into something more sinister, after a female skeleton is unearthed by a team of workmen, while digging up an old pathway.

Gradually, as past murders and disappearances reveal similarities with the present case, Roy is left in no doubt he is now looking for a serial killer... one with an apparent penchant for long, dark-haired young women, branding them with the words U R Dead before finally disposing of them.

Roy's increasing involvement in the investigations leaves Cleo to deal with a fractious baby, and the stress of moving, all by herself, contributing to her growing understanding of what it means to be married to a copper.

With his superiors breathing down his neck to get results, Roy has to work against the clock to catch the killer – labelled The Brighton Brander – before more young women end up dead and the situation creates panic within the local community.

MY REVIEW

Peter James is truly a masterful writer of crime novels, and *'You Are Dead'* is a further illustration of his talent. Like all the previous books in this series, the story is set in Brighton, the home for many years of his main character, Detective Superintendent Roy Grace. The eleventh book in this series, it is a fast-paced and gripping murder mystery that maintains suspense and tension right up to the final pages.

Peter James has woven an exciting story together with a realistic take on police procedure. This adds real authenticity to the narrative, drawing the reader into the investigation. His use of description and attention to detail are key elements in the creation of such vivid and believable storytelling. However, occasionally, I did feel it could distract from the free flow of the action.

The character of Roy Grace is convincing as a real person. He displays a range of human failings and contradictions but, essentially, he has a good heart and a great capacity for love and loyalty. Crucially, he demonstrates an almost heroic level of dedication and focus when it comes to his work.

Still haunted by his love for his ex wife Sandy, his emotions are most poignantly tested when a woman turns up in a German hospital, after being badly hurt in a road accident, and he realises there is a possibility she may be Sandy. As he is newly married, he is suddenly faced with a potentially impossible dilemma.

DS Roy Grace is supported by a dependable and hard working team, his closest colleague being DI Glenn Branson, who always has Roy's back. As the investigation gets underway, several other colleagues become involved in the solving and handling of the case. Although I am sure this is true to life, at times I found it hard to keep track of all the names of the minor characters. However, despite my unreliable memory, this did little to spoil my enjoyment. When it came down to it, their names mattered less than their contribution to the drama... and in this they succeeded admirably.

Without giving anything away, I can definitely confirm the killer in this story ticks all the boxes – disturbing, ruthless, callous and lacking any moral sense or capacity for remorse. He is truly the stuff of nightmares, but even he has a back story.

I am sure fans of Peter James will need no encouragement from me to read this novel but, nevertheless, I thoroughly recommend it. I am now off to appease my friend and read the rest of the Roy Grace series... while he is still talking to me.

THE AUTHOR

Peter James is an international bestselling thriller writer. He is a New York Times bestseller, as well as having 11 consecutive Sunday Times No 1s, and he is published in 37 languages. His DS Roy Grace crime novels have sold 18 million copies worldwide. Prior to becoming a full-time author, he was responsible for 25 movies. In 1994 Penguin published his novel, 'Host', on two floppy discs as the world's first electronic novel. His novels have won numerous awards, most recently the coveted 2016 CWA Diamond Dagger for sustained excellence, and he was publicly voted by WH Smith - Britain's biggest book selling chain - The Best Crime Author Of All Time. Visit Peter James on YouTube: www.peterjames.com/youtube

'You Are Dead' is published by Pan Books (an imprint of Pan MacMillan) and is available in eBook and paperback format. It can be purchased from Amazon, Waterstones and W H Smith.